

Ipswich 3A
Focus Group – Community
Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 4:45pm at Town Hall Room A
Meeting Notes

At the Community Focus Group, a brief introductory presentation was given by MAPC which included framing for small group discussion. The small group discussions included (4) groups facilitated by Town Planning and Development staff and MAPC staff. Each group included between 6 and 10 Ipswich residents. The small group discussions were divided into three sections and included a discussion of housing issues and opportunities in Ipswich, discussion of principles and goals that should guide the 3A approach for Ipswich, and a map-based exercise to gather feedback about where a 3A district should be considered, or not considered in the Ipswich Station Area and town-wide. The individual notes from each group are recorded below.

Group 1 (facilitated by John Cruz)

Issues and Opportunities

- Lack of affordability
- Market rate is too expensive
- Desire for single-level units
- Homes are not right sized, no smaller options for older folks or young families
- Lack of availability – few options, people jump on whatever becomes available
- Town’s infill development efforts have not produced smaller units – just large buildings and nothing affordable
- Lack of rental options
- Lack of housing diversity leads to lack of town diversity
- Short-term rentals eat away at housing stock
- Projects do not always fit the town character, need for a bylaw to address aesthetics
- Some people mentioned a snow shoveling bylaw that the town does not enforce, and they do not clear the walking paths either, so there were concerns that new multifamily development, especially near the train station, would have pedestrian problems because nobody shovels the walks, and the town doesn’t enforce their own bylaw.

Principles and Goals

- Housing options – rental to be encouraged
- Single-level units
- Affordable units
- Minimal resident impact because of new units
- Design standards to protect town character
- Development appropriate for the size and scale of parcel and part of town
- Avoid sprawling conditions where the boundary between municipalities is not clear
- Tie municipal service offerings to population growth

Group 2 (facilitated by Andrea Bates)

Issues and Opportunities

- Types of housing

- Not enough single-level housing
- Housing design of 2-car garage on first floor undesirable re: community. 3A could be an opportunity to build something other than townhomes
- Newburyport is example community of good housing planning
- Three-deckers work well for first floor accessibility
- Tiny home development is desirable, but this is difficult to do in Ipswich due to land and topographical constraints on undeveloped parcels
- Population diversity will only happen with housing stock diversity, and this cannot occur with only single-family housing. We need cheaper/more affordable housing
- Difficulty downsizing
- Opportunity to look at like Farley Ave, where there is ample opportunity for infill and new housing creation
- Redevelopment/adaptive reuse is difficult because of demo delay ordinance
- Rental prices are too high
- Need for senior housing
- Need for multigenerational housing opportunities
 - Accessory units/ apartments can help with this
- Utilities:
 - Town center has public sewer, which makes this area desirable for redevelopment
 - To what extent will sewer extension bylaw of 50 ft limit development? Could be impediment
 - If trying to be consistent with smart growth, a key principle is concentrating development in areas where infrastructure can support it (Town center)
 - Electrification push is a concern given existing ELD capacity, which could worsen with more housing
 - Concerns about stressing infrastructure, particularly water and electric. Is the burden on the town or developer if utilities aren't sufficient?

Principles and Goals

- Greater housing diversity and increase affordability and affordable housing:
 - How can we enable developers to build the kind of smaller, more affordable housing we want?
 - Recent/past development has focused on million-dollar homes, which has reduced housing diversity
 - Cost of land, permitting/regulatory processes are prohibitive. Types of available land also often come with encumbrances (wet, topographical constraints), thereby increasing development expense
 - Improving the marketplace is a solution, but this solution is at a level above Town government
 - Non-profit developer partnerships may be one option to create smaller housing options
- Lessen impact on infrastructure
 - Water Neutral Growth
 - Encourage more self-reliance in homeownership: solar panels, etc.
 - How will development impact Town utilities?

- More apartments
 - Challenge is loud opposition to apartments and multifamily housing
- Smaller, well-built, efficient housing
 - Challenge is this type of housing is cost prohibitive in today's marketplace, especially for small developers, many of whom have been pushed out of the marketplace
- Accessibility
- Encourage smaller developers
 - Construction a three-family house is a simpler process than many-unit buildings, and these can be constructed on infill lots
- Greater population diversity, through greater housing diversity

Group 3 (facilitated by Josh Fiala)

Issues and Opportunities

- Participants: Scott, Dave, Taylor, Chris, Karl, and Diane
- Need to clarify requirements for compliance
- Clarify that the unit build-out is hypothetical and how existing units relate to the figure
- Clarify that 3A allows Site Plan Review
- Create a question-and-answer summary and post it in the newspaper
- Requires a 2/3 vote by Town Meeting? (confirm)
- Residents can't stand the 40B process, feels more dangerous compared to 3A process, 40B is abused and can happen anywhere in the Town
- Address issues/zoning in three-dimensional way with performance standards
- Helpful information would be examples of housing in Ipswich with units per acre. Visuals are huge and helpful.
- Issues with infrastructure – schools, this is a heavy-handed law – build new infrastructure with investments. Causing stress on current infrastructure, can't serve this future development.
- Political issue is infrastructure – these unit counts could be the straw that breaks the camels back (collectively)
- Current zoning allows more density than is being built – people don't know this
- See 3A as a huge handout to developers
- Special Permit is too discretionary – the special permit process has been abused locally to make approvals very difficult
- Need good examples of this type of density and other aesthetic examples that would be desirable
- Continuity for design is desired
- Guardrails on what can be built – form-based code – more picture with less words (suggested by Chris Doktor)
- Need a build out analysis – where we are today – what we're talking about? (suggested by Chris Doktor)
- Finances and potential municipal impact – to buy into it, need to know the implications and analysis
- Affordability – 10% threshold is pathetic – 20% in downtown scaled down to 60% AMI

- Single family compared to multifamily – water use, municipal financial impacts – what is the comparison, which is better?
- Property tax issues – will the property tax revenues be same, which is better?
- History on how Town is growing – what is the 10-year projection, what is the municipal fiscal impact analysis.
- Is there an opportunity to place better restrictions than in current zoning?
- Opportunity – don't change the character of the district
- Compliance with 40B is difficult because it is a moving target.
- Done (2) small 40B's in Ipswich – Carl Gardner
- Fear becoming Beverly – Rantoul and Cabot is better, Newburyport is better
- EBSCO (out of Alabama), discuss with them
- Mandatory – is it mandatory? This is sensitive language for the community – to say it is mandatory turns off a lot of community members
- Example is the MA Stretch Energy Code – when a Town complies and adopts it, there is a clause that states the state can change anything at anytime

Principles and Goals

- Affordability – 20% comply with 40B requirements
- Should be primarily rental housing – density to support rental
- Encourage affordable rentals
- Affordable/expensive – both should look nice
- Extensive guidelines are good for the Town
- Aesthetics – address 3A
- Design Guidelines
- Infrastructure – schools, water, projections, timeline, tax projections
 - Data analysis of school enrollment would be very helpful
 - Roads in Town are tough, bridges
 - Sewer capacity – check
 - Electric is great
 - WUMP – instigated by Water Department – pay into fund to reduce water use in the community – how will it work for 3A, will it work, is it viable?
- How to have water neutral development – figure out how to do it – INI reduce
- Collaborations with nonprofits – Harbor Light, Habitat for Humanity, Non-profit developers
- A financial decision

Group 4 (facilitated by Brendan Conboy)

Issues and Opportunities

- Discussion of what 15 units per acre means – Dan had difficulty conceptualizing what 15 units per acre means.
- Just moved here during covid, real estate prices going crazy, having a diverse community for families to move into.
- What might be helpful for people to understand – small lot single family to actual parse out some of the specific numbers on a building.
- Cost is a huge prohibitive issue. A lot of older people who live in town would like to downsize and that isn't an option.

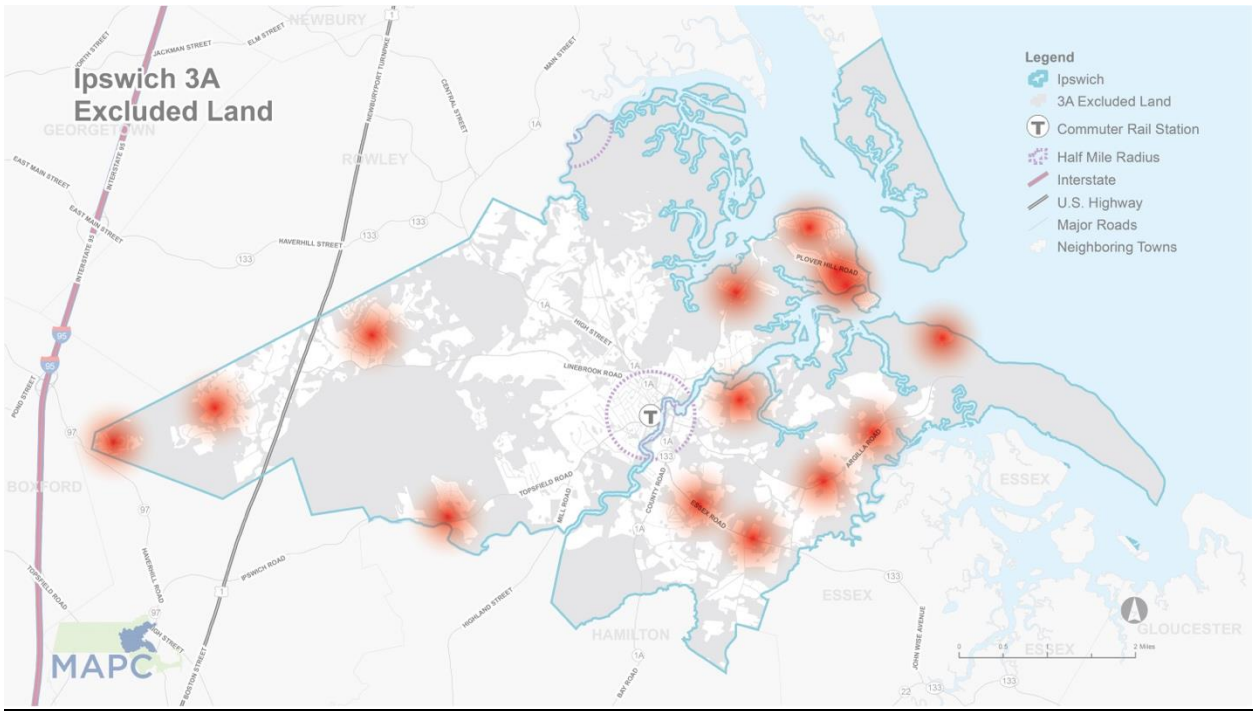
- From an economic perspective it is a question of supply. This type of initiative can promote supply.
- The focus is on increasing the density in this location, there is traffic issues associated with the density.
- Talked about her stretch code that failed. We tried to include livability standards for multi-family development. 83 High Street. Shared amenities outdoors.
- Allows us to do the HPP and CDP, its 'forcing' us to do something we should be doing anyways
- 3A is part of the equation.
- We have one car and we get around on a bike. We could keep that up with the train because we live close. We are not putting as much traffic demand on the community.

Principles and Goals

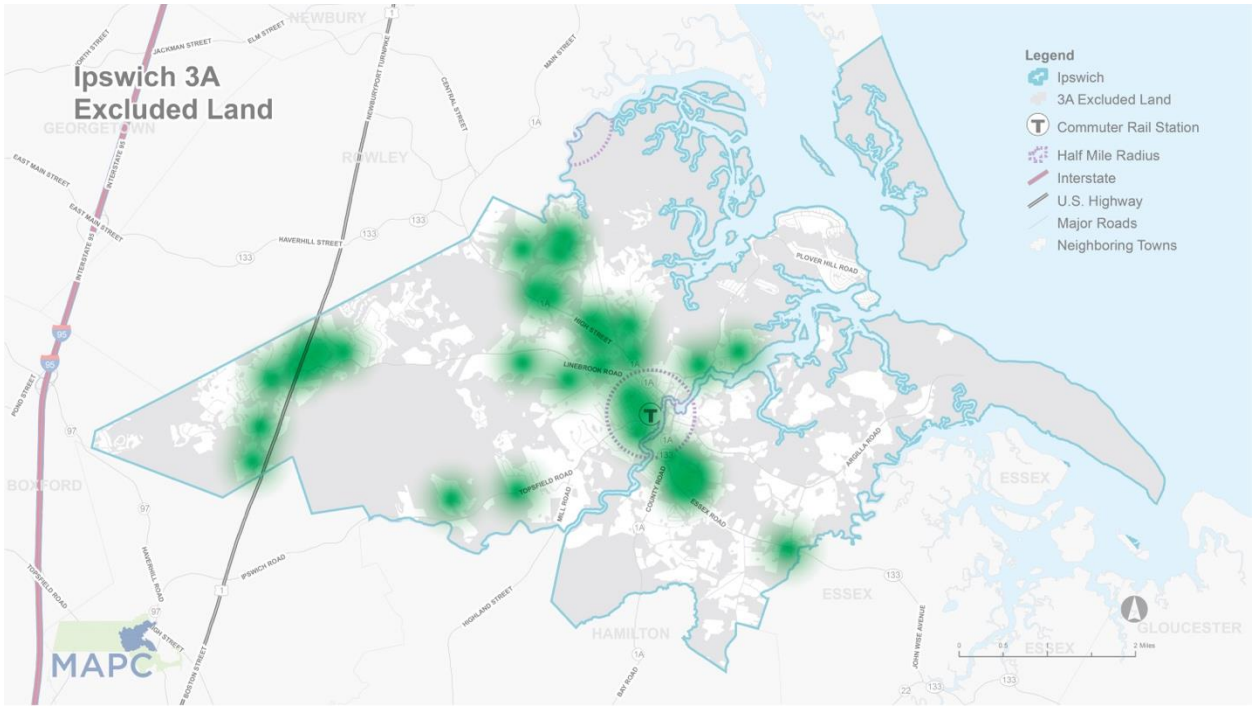
- Affordability as high as we can
- To the extent possible maintain the architectural character of the town.
- Does it fit into the comprehensive plan? Does it fit within the constraints of infrastructure
- We develop something that encompasses the whole town
- Try to maximize the sustainability and energy efficiency where possible. Balance the long term affordability with the short term material costs
- Encourage the preservation of the historic fabric – what about excluding the apdc
- Water – has been a huge controversy for the town
- Schools – ensure level of service remains high

Mapping Exercise (all groups combined)

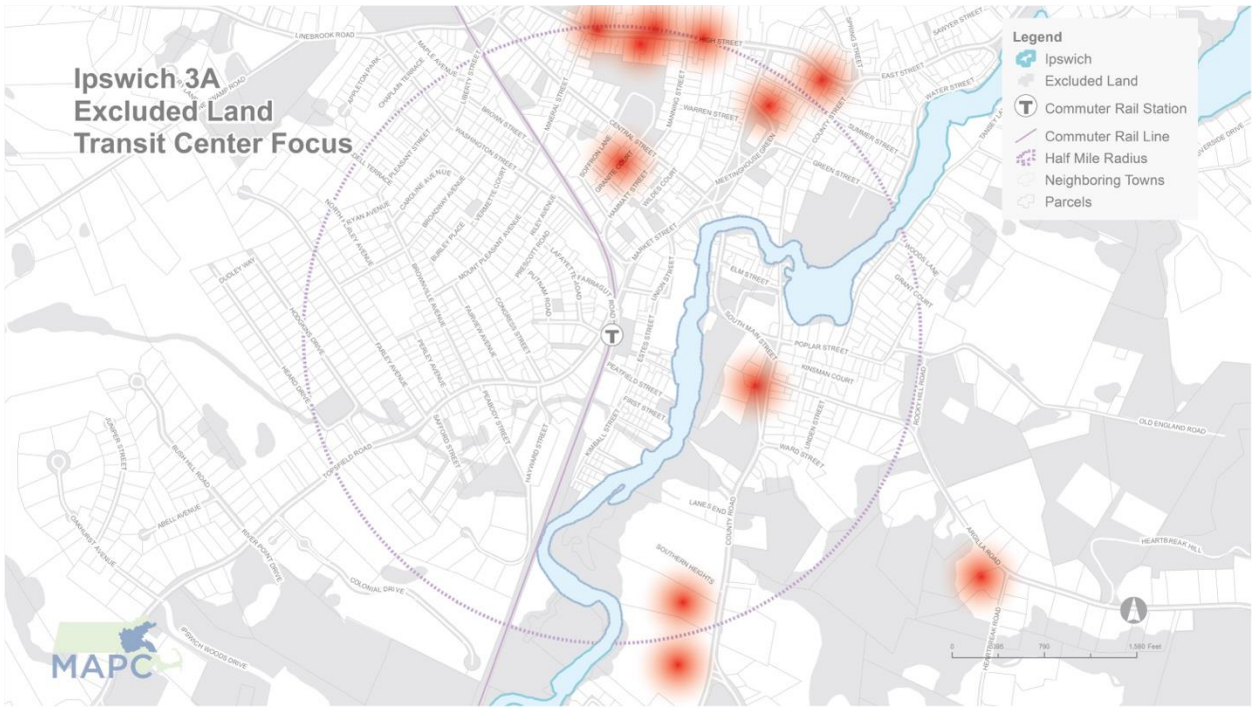
Town-wide locations suggested to exclude from consideration for 3A



Town-wide locations suggested to include for consideration for 3A



Station Area locations suggested to exclude from consideration for 3A



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